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ABSTRACT

This paper presents preliminary research findings, using qualitative and quantitative methods, on the washback effect of the revised Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination in English in Hong Kong secondary schools. The research employed various methodological techniques such as questionnaires (one sent out to 42 students; and the other to 48 teachers), interviews, and classroom observations, which are based on an in-depth case study approach to sampled schools in Hong Kong. Findings indicate that the washback effect worked quickly and efficiently to bring about changes in teaching materials, largely due to the commercial characteristics of Hong Kong society, but somewhat slowly, reluctantly, and with difficulty in the methodology that teachers employ. It is suggested that teaching content has so far received the most intensive washback effects, although washback effects have also been observed in teachers' attitudes and behaviors and in the English curriculum. (Contains 38 references.) (Author/NAV)

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HOW DOES WASHBACK INFLUENCE TEACHING? IMPLICATIONS FOR HONG KONG

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ABSTRACT

There is some evidence to suggest that tests have washback effects on teaching and learning (Alderson and Wall, 1993). The extensive use of test scores for various educational and social purposes in society nowadays has made the effect of washback a significant phenomenon. This paper presents preliminary research findings on the washback effect of the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination in English in Hong Kong secondary schools by employing various methodological techniques such as two questionnaires, interviews and classroom observations, which are based on an in-depth case study approach to sampled schools in Hong Kong. It further discusses the nature of washback effect, the major teaching and learning aspects influenced by it, the different stages of washback effect, and the types of washback effects observed. Preliminary results indicate that washback effect works quickly and efficiently in bringing about changes in teaching materials, which is due largely to the commercial characteristics of the Hong Kong society, and slowly and reluctantly and with difficulties in the methodology teachers employ. It is suggested that the latter effect may be caused by the constraints imposed upon teaching and teachers in our present schools.

INTRODUCTION

The role of school-as-a-selection-device has been particularly evident in the Hong Kong educational system from early days (Biggs, 1993). Assessment in Hong Kong is still geared towards providing data to select students: not only in the HKCE (Hong Kong Certificate of Education) at the end of Secondary 5 and HKAL (Hong Kong Advanced Level) at the end of Secondary 7 for tertiary selection, but also in primary schools, to provide the data for banding in the Secondary School Places Allocation exercise. The Hong Kong educational system is characterized as an examination-led system where what goes on in the classroom is largely dictated by what happens in the public examination halls (Fullilove, 1992).

Washback or *backwash* is a term that can be found frequently in official documents in Hong Kong about general education and language education in particular (See Hong Kong Government, 1984, 1986 & 1990 and the Education Department, 1989; HKEA, 1993). For

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example, it is stressed in Education Commission Report No.4 (1990) that " a project should be carried out to determine the 'backwash' effects of different forms of assessment".

In Hong Kong, certain washback effects are expected whenever language examinations are introduced. Some examples of the positive washback effect of public examinations in Hong Kong are reported in the literature (See Andrews and Fullilove, 1994; Andrews, 1993; Fullilove, 1992 and Johnson and Wong, 1981). In Education Commission Report No. 4, it is stated that

> "The Hong Kong Examinations Authority is well aware of the fact that the syllabi for HKCEE affect the curriculum and even the teaching methods in schools, particularly in Secondary 4 and 5. ... the revised HKCEE syllabi have served to improve the clarity of the curriculum objectives which has had a positive influence on teaching."

Moreover, Morris (1990) states that any change in the Hong Kong educational system must first involve a change in the examination. However, what is still not clear is the nature of washback and the scope of the effects of public examinations in Hong Kong. A search of the literature indicates that washback effects are more perceived or assumed than supported by empirical data.

BACKGROUND

This research was designed to investigate whether or not any washback effect of the revised Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination in English (HKCEE) by the Hong Kong Examinations Authority could be observed in the teaching of English in Hong Kong secondary schools. The revised examination syllabus was used for the first time in classroom teaching in September, 1994 in Hong Kong secondary schools. The first cohort of students will sit for the revised examination in May, 1996. The aim of the study was to observe how the whole education system would react in the context of the change in its assessment practice and to attempt to discover the implications of the washback effect on the teaching of English in Hong Kong secondary schools.

The HKCEE is a public examination sat by the majority of secondary students at the end of the fifth year of their secondary school. Students will proceed either to further studies at the Sixth form level, or will leave school and seek employment. Two separate syllabuses, namely the examination syllabus by HKEA (Hong Kong Examinations Authority) and the teaching syllabus by the CDC (Curriculum Development Council) coexist in Hong Kong secondary schools. It is stated in the teaching Syllabus for English Language (Hong Kong Curriculum Development Committee, 1983) that

"It must be recognized that for both these groups of students, the Hong Kong Certificate of Education examination assumes critical importance. For almost all of them the results they achieve in this examination will be the prime factor determining their future careers. It seems vital, then, that the teaching syllabus at this stage and the examination syllabus should be in step, ..." (1983:12-13)

In 1993, the HKEA introduced major changes to its existing examination syllabus in English in accord with the Target Oriented Curriculum (TOC) initiative in Hong Kong.

"The proposed changes of the 1996 HKCEE in English aim to modernize and improve the examination syllabus as well as to incorporate some TOC principles by adopting an integrated approach and by being more task-based. It is expected that the change will narrow the gap between what happens in the exam room and the real world." (Hong Kong Examinations Authority, 1993: Appendix C1)

This attempt to "narrow the gap" is reflected in the major changes to the present examination which are mainly in two papers of the examination, namely paper III and Paper VI. Paper III: Integrated Listening, Reading and Writing, consists of several short tasks and extended tasks which require students to perform those tasks by integrativeiy employing information through different skills. Part IV: Oral, has changed greatly from reading aloud and guided conversation to task-based role play and group discussion. Both examination papers require students to take an active role and participate fully in language interaction.

As is well known in the field of education, assessment practices are currently undergoing a major paradigm shift which can be classed as a reaction to the prevailing paradigm - the emphasis on standardized testing and its perceived shortcomings (Biggs, 1994 and Genesee, 1994,). Hong Kong is no exception as its Target Oriented Curriculum aims at a target-based approach to curriculum and assessment. The changes made in the present HKCE public examination reflect one step towards assessing students' language abilities to carry out real-life tasks. However, unlike the target-based TOC, this public examination is norm-referenced at this stage bearing the major function of selecting students rather than educating them.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A number of research studies have been carried out in this area looking at the relationship between testing and teaching and learning. Shohamy (1993) comments on some of the common terms used to refer to the phenomenon. *Washback effect* refers to the influence of testing on teaching and learning (Alderson and Wall, 1993; Hughes, 1988; Khaniya, 1990; Kirkland, 1971; Pearson, 1988; Wesdrop, 1982). *Measurement-driven instruction* refers to the notion

that test should drive teaching and hence learning (Bracey, 1987; Frederiksen, 1984; Haladyna, 1991; Li, 1990, Popham, 1987; Smith, 1991). Popham claims that "measurement-driven instruction is the most cost-effective way of improving the quality of public education". (1987:679)

Curriculum alignment focuses on the connection between the testing and teaching syllabus (Andrews, 1993; Linn, 1983; Madaus, 1988 and Shepard, 1993, 1991 and 1990). *Systemic validity* implies the integration of tests into the educational system and the need to demonstrate that the introduction of a new test can improve learning (Frederiksen and Collins, 1989; Fullilove, 1992; Johnson and Wong, 1981). Frederiksen and Collins (1989) state that "A systematically valid test is one that induces in the education system curricular and instructional changes that foster the development of the cognitive skills that the test is designed to measure". (1989:27)

Traditionally, tests come at the end of the teaching and learning process. However, with the advent of high-stake public examinations testing nowadays, the direction seems to be reversed. Testing usually comes first before the teaching and learning process. Pearson (1988) points out that examinations are commonly used as levers for change. In those cases, textbooks will be designed to match the purposes of a new test. Administrative and organization staff, teachers and students will all work hard to achieve better scores on the test.

In addition, a lot more changes in teaching and learning would happen as a result of a particular test. Often such consequences are independent of the original intentions of the test designers. When a test is designed and test results analyzed, it is no longer the end of the job. Test designers turn to evaluate the consequences their test might have brought about in teaching and learning, be it social, psychological, ethical, curricular or educational (Shahomy, 1993). She further points out that "The need to include aspects of test use in construct validation originates in the fact that testing is not an isolated event; rather, it is connected to a whole set of variables that interact in the educational process." (1993:2)

The consequences or the influences a particular test brings are regarded as the extended construct validity of the test. Messick (1989) recommended a unified validity concept, in which he shows that when an assessment model is designed to make inferences about a certain construct, the inferences made from that assessment model should not only derive from test score interpretation but also from other variables under the social context. Testing is not an isolated event; it is connected with a whole set of variables that interact in the education process.

However, as Alderson and Wall (1993) point out, the quality of washback effect might be independent of the quality of a test. It is possible for good tests to produce good and/or bad

effects. Furthermore, bad tests do not necessarily produce bad effects. Morrow (1986) uses the term "washback validity" to describe the quality of the relationship between testing and teaching. He claims that "... in essence an examination of washback validity would take testing researchers into the classroom in order to observe the effect of their tests in action."

It is also assumed that if a test is supposed to be good, it would most likely drive teaching and learning. This might be due to the nature of assessment if it is used for the purpose of selection. However, whatever changes educators would like to bring into teaching and learning by whatever assessment methods, it is worthwhile first exploring the broad educational context under which an assessment is introduced. Alderson and Wall (1993) point out that

> "It is surely conceivable that other forces exist within society, education, and schools that might prevent washback from appearing, or that might affect the nature of washback despite the 'communicative' quality of a test." (1993:116)

It is felt that it would be worthwhile investigating first the nature of the examination in teaching and learning, then the nature of the washback effect and the conditions under which it operates. However, it should not be only the testers' job to evaluate any consequences of the tests alone. Instead, it should be the job of those involved in the whole education system to evaluate the consequences. And if we intend to evaluate the consequences a particular test brings about in teaching and learning in an educational context, we ought to first investigate the educational context in which the test is issued.

Little empirical research has been carried out to investigate this education phenomenon either in the field of general education or in the specific field of language education. A number of research studies have been carried out by survey and interview methods collecting data on the effects of standardized testing (Frederiksen, 1984; Haladyna, Nolen and Haas, 1991; Madaus and Airasian, 1982;). Smith (1991) investigated the effect of tests on the teacher and classrooms through qualitative studies. Alderson and Wall (1993) investigated this phenomenon by detailed classroom observation. A few researchers (Hughes, 1989 and Khaniya,1990) used language tests to measure the influence of tests on students' learning outcomes.

METHOD

This research study was designed to combine quantitative and qualitative research methods. The study started at the same time as the introduction of the revised syllabus in 1994. The researcher worked as an outsider and observer to record anything that might have occurred due to the introduction of the revised examination syllabus. Observations were essential and key in this type of exploratory study. There are two levels of washback phenomena that lend

themselves to observation. First, the present education context related to the teaching and learning situations in Hong Kong secondary schools can be observed (See Figure 1). The purpose of observation was to find out which parties reacted most to the examination change. The current researcher would like to use a term "washback intensity"[1] to refer to *the degree of washback effect in an area or a number of areas that an examination affects most*. Secondly, investigation can be carried out in depth in a particular area or areas of teaching and learning affected by the examination.

Different methods such as questionnaires, interviews, school visits and classroom observations were employed to achieve the above research purpose in depth. While questionnaires give a general picture as to how teachers and students react in the context of the revised syllabus, interviews and classroom observations tend to provide detailed information about what teachers and students actually do in the classroom. All these methods complement each other in this type of research.

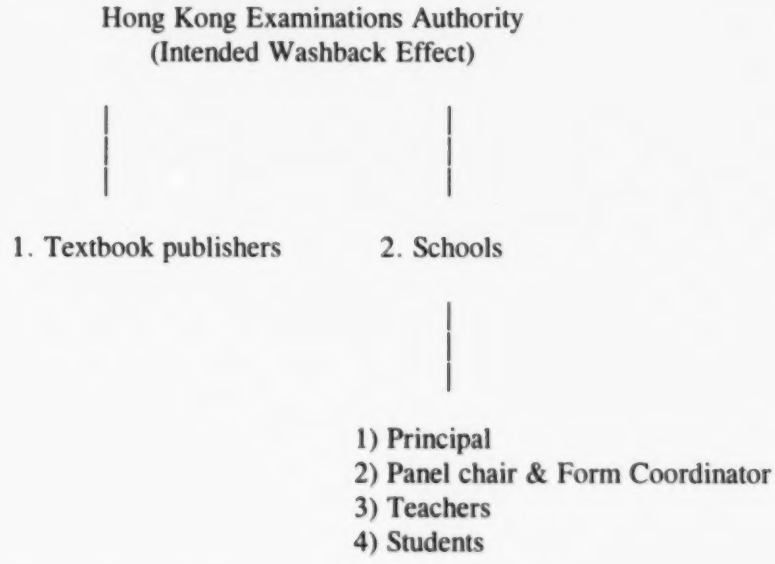

Figure 1 Flowchart of washback on the education context in Hong Kong

[1] I am grateful to Peter Gu, a research colleague, for suggesting the term.

Interview

Semi-structured and free response interviews were carried out throughout the study. Interviews with HKEA aimed to find out what the intended washback effects were when the authority made changes to its existing syllabus. Interviews with textbook publishers were used to investigate how they understood the intended changes and how they integrated the changes into textbook revision. In-depth interviews as follow up study were carried out among teachers during school visits to find out how they reacted to the change in their classroom teaching.

Survey

1. Teachers' questionnaire[2]

The questionnaire was designed to obtain preliminary data on teachers' reactions toward the revised examination, their perceptions and understanding of the examination and what they would like to prepare their students for the examination. The first part of the questionnaire was designed in such a way that teachers first responded to particular questions related to possible changes in those areas of teaching and learning in the context of the revised HKCEE with a yes or no answer. Then they were asked to explain further their own views with written answers. The second part of the questionnaire was related to the present teaching situation such as teachers' teaching arrangements, the choice of textbooks and the teaching methods they employ in their schools. This part of the questionnaire was designed on a five point likert scale.

2. Students' questionnaire

Meanwhile, a student questionnaire was issued with the primary aim of investigating the role of the public examination in students' learning. They were further invited to comment on the actual teaching and learning of English in their schools. The questionnaire was designed on a five point likert scale. The part related to students' attitude toward public examinations was scaled according to the degree of agreement. The part related to their learning activities inside and outside the classroom was scaled according to frequency.

Classroom observation

At present, there are two versions of the examination syllabus, the old syllabus and the revised syllabus in Hong Kong secondary schools due to the introduction of the revised HKCEE in 1994. Two cohorts of students are available for study: one group ought to take the old

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[2] The author would like to thank Lam Hui Por, a research colleague, for his questionnaire on washback effect into the Use of English in Hong Kong, and for the useful comments he gave on the development of my own questionnaire.

examination in 1995; the other ought to take the new exam in 1996. There are some teachers[3] who are currently teaching both groups at the same time. Therefore, classroom observations were carried out to observe the same teachers teaching both groups of students. The preliminary observations were carried out to observe any change in the classroom activities employed by the same teachers teaching both groups.

RESULTS

This research typically deals with a life cycle of possible changes that a change in its major public examination might bring about in the teaching and learning of English in Hong Kong secondary schools over the lapse of time. A series of changes at the macro level have been first observed. These changes showed the reactions from different parties in the Hong Kong education system, and the necessary support they offered to get the change across to schools at the micro level.

Seminars and workshops

The 1996 HKCEE examination syllabus was implemented in Hong Kong secondary schools in September, 1994 which aimed to prepare the first cohort of students for two years from Secondary 4 to Secondary 5 before they actually sit for the examination. Half a year before the teaching toward the new syllabus began, a series of seminars and workshops were organized to offer help to teachers.

1. HKEA seminars
Seminars were organized with the aim of providing teachers with information of changes such as the rationale and contents of the proposed changes, and the test formats to be employed. Discussion was carried out over the issues related to school and teacher responses, and their worries over the revised examination syllabus . Sample papers and the new test formats were also introduced.

2. University seminars
Seminars were organized by tertiary institutes with the major aim to give teachers the necessary methodological strategies that they urgently required to deal with the proposed changes in facing the revised examination.

3. Textbook publishers' seminars

[3] The usual arrangement of English teaching in Hong Kong secondary schools is to arrange same teachers to teach both Secondary 4 and 5.

Seminars and workshops which received the largest audience of teacher participation were those organized by different textbook publishers. In Hong Kong, textbooks are by far the most direct teaching support teachers can obtain and rely on for their teaching. Textbook publishers provided their own understanding of the proposed changes and revealed how they had integrated the changes into their textbooks. They then demonstrated to the teachers how these language activities could be carried out in the classroom. A lot of sample activities were demonstrated during those seminars. Suggestions about the time to be devoted to particular activities were also provided.

Survey results

1. Teachers' questionnaire

A preliminary survey was carried out in April, 1994 among 48 teachers from various kinds of Hong Kong schools, i.e. government, aided or private schools. Their average teaching experience ranged from three to six years with the majority having a first degree. 62% were teaching in English medium schools whereas 29% taught in Chinese medium schools. The survey was carried out 4 months before teachers began teaching toward the revised examination syllabus for the first cohort of F4 students. The following results show teachers' primary reactions to the revised HKCEE and reactions to different aspects of the teaching and learning in their schools (See Table 1).

1) Reaction to and knowledge of the revised HKCEE

When teachers were asked about their reaction to the new examination, 37% of them were skeptical about the changes, 29% were neutral and another 21% welcomed or enthusiastically endorsed the changes. There were 13% of teachers did not response the question.

Four months before the teaching toward the revised examination, the majority of the respondents, 79% and 63% respectively knew the year in which the revised HKCEE would be issued, the major skills to be tested and the changes made in the test formats (See Table 1).

2) Reaction to teaching methodology and content

84% of the teachers commented that they would change their teaching methodology as a result of the introduction of the 1996 HKCEE. They mentioned in their verbatim replies to the questionnaire;

"I would put emphasis on the integration of the skills."
"Oral practice will mainly base on facilitating discussion among students."
"To invite active participation from my students."

While 66% of the teachers mentioned that the proposed changes in the 1996 examination syllabus do NOT contradict their present teaching methodology, 68% of teachers felt the new examination would add pressure to their teaching. They believed that they had to do extra work to cope with it. 73% of the teachers thought that teaching for the new examination would involve using more teaching materials and aids such as audio & video facilities. At the same time, teachers showed their concern over the revised examination as they regarded it as much more demanding for their students than the present examination.

"How can I make students listen and speak more? I have to cut extra materials for my students."

"Put more effort to train students' listening and speaking ability. But it is hard to do so since most students' English standard is not good. And their writing ability have not been built up."

"Students are usually shy and timid. It is difficult to teach them how to speak out."

"It is a bit too harsh for the students. Most of the students will not be able to deal with it."

Regarding teaching materials, 4 months before teaching towards the 1996 examination syllabus began, 55% of the schools had already changed textbooks for the teaching of English. By the time the actual teaching began, nearly every school in Hong Kong whose students would sit for the 1996 HKCEE employed revised textbooks targeted toward the new examination. Teachers were provided with new teaching materials in their teaching.

3) Reaction to learning strategy

76% of the teachers mentioned that they would certainly suggest that students should change their learning strategies because of the new examination. 47% of teachers perceived that the new examination would motivate students to learn English. However, some teachers still showed their worry about shy and less outspoken students since the new examination would involve active participation in learning. In the new syllabus, students have to initiate questions rather than to answer questions passively.

4) The present teaching situation

The situation in Hong Kong secondary schools is that teaching and learning is usually based on a major textbook together with a set of workbooks. These workbooks are specifically designed to prepare students for specific examination papers[4] in the HKCEE. When students reach F5 level, teaching and learning become more and more examination-driven. Some of the schools simply use practice papers right from the beginning of F5 to the time when they sit for the examination[5]. Full preparation of their students for the examination is seen in Hong Kong secondary schools as the responsibility of teachers and principals.

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[4] The existing HKCEE in English consists of five papers. The revised HKCEE will consist of four papers. They are Paper I Writing, Paper II Reading Comprehension and Usage, Paper III Integrated Listening, Reading and Writing, Paper IV Oral.

[5] This kind of teaching arrangement can be found in various schools during school visits.

No.	Item	yes	no
1.	Teachers know the year in which the new exam will take place.	79%	21%
2.	Teachers know the major skills to be tested.	63%	26%
3.	Teachers would like to change their teaching methodology.	84%	16%
4.	Teachers feel the new exam would add pressure to their teaching.	68%	32%
5.	Teachers regard the new examination as contradictory to their teaching philosophy.	11%	66%
6.	Teachers regard the new examination as an involvement of more teaching aids.	71%	11%
7.	Teachers would suggest that their students should change their learning strategies.	76%	24%
8.	Teachers perceive that the new exam would motivate their students to learn English.	47%	18%

Table 1 Teachers' reactions to aspects of teaching toward the revised HKCEE

61% of the respondents stated that the selection of particular textbooks was made by teachers jointly. 24% and 13% of them stated that the decision was made by panel chairs and principals respectively. As to the lesson arrangement, decisions are made by teachers according to 60% of the respondents and panel chairs according to 29% of the respondents. 61% of the English lessons are arranged for the purpose of teaching separate skills such as listening, reading or grammar usage. Only 5% of the lessons are integratedly skill arranged.

In Hong Kong secondary schools, among the factors that influence teaching, examinations play a 30% role in teachers' teaching. Teaching belief and teaching experience play 35% and 6% roles in teaching. The rest of the influencing factors, 19%, 7% and 3% respectively are attributed to learners', principal's and peers' expectations. Moreover, 68% of teachers reported that they had never been negatively affected by their students' past test scores.

2. Students' questionnaire

A preliminary survey was carried out in November 1994. The subjects involved were 42 students in one Secondary 5 class in the New Territory. Among them, only 35% of students go to private tutorials for preparing for HKCEE.

1) Opinions on the HKCEE

When students were asked about their motivation to learn English, it was discovered that HKCEE plays a 30% role in their learning; future job 27%, parent concern 19%, classmate competition 8%. Teacher, textbook and learning activities play 7%, 5%, 4% roles respectively among other learning factors. It can be seen that two factors, public examinations and future jobs are the main factors that motivate student learning in Hong Kong secondary schools. As is mentioned above, the major role of the public examination is the role of selection. Passing the public examination and thus obtaining a good job are closely related. Thus it would be crucial for students to get a good score on the examination.

Almost all students mentioned that they were influenced in one way or another by public examinations. When they were asked what aspects of their life might be affected by the examination results, future job opportunity came highest on the list. The remaining aspects affected by the examination were in the following order; learning strategies, emotion, motivation, self-image and teacher-student relationship. According to the students, their exam results affected parents in the following way; 1) the advice their parents gave them 2) parents became tense and anxious and 3) parents put more pressure on them.

2) Opinions on current teaching and leaning

When students were asked to rank their language activities according to skills in the classroom, listening comes as the most frequent activity they do. It is common in Hong Kong secondary schools that students listen to their teacher talking most of the time in the classroom. The second most frequent activity they do in class are activities related to language exercises such as grammar or vocabulary. Reading and writing occupy similar class time whereas the amount of time spent in speaking is ranked the lowest. In 57% of class time, teachers talk to the whole class. Only in less than 5% of the time, do teachers keep silent during teaching. The major activities the teachers do in rank order according to the students were 1) explanation of language points, 2) explanation of language activities, 3) explanation of home work and 4) explanation of lesson objectives.

When students were asked to comment on the activities they do in English in class, doing exercises and finding out answers from exercises were the most frequent activities. These were followed by inquiring or asking their teacher for further explanation. Regarding their activities in English outside class, watching TV or reading newspapers and magazines in English were the most frequent activities they did. Communicating with teachers, classmates or parents were among the least activities they did outside class.

classroom observation

Classroom observations were carried out on a small scale among those teachers who were willing to be observed. As the observation procedure is still in progress, the available changes that were observed lay in the different activities teachers employed. For example, for the present F5 students, it is required in the present HKCEE that they have to demonstrate their ability to read aloud a dialogue. Teachers would teach their students in the way that is required by the examination - reading aloud. A lot of reading aloud activities were carried by choral practising reading aloud a dialogue. Whereas with F4, the group of students for the revised HKCEE, reading aloud is replaced by role play and group discussion. Teachers no longer taught reading aloud. More and more time were spent on group discussions and oral presentations.

DISCUSSION

The above results from the preliminary investigation showed the following degree of washback effect in the few areas of teaching and learning in Hong Kong secondary schools as a result of the changes of the present HKCEE.

Washback on teaching contents

The most dramatic change due to the introduction of the 1996 HKCEE lay in the content of teaching - area of washback intensity. By the time the examination syllabus affected teaching in Hong Kong secondary schools in the 1994 academic year, nearly every school had changed their textbooks for the students. All of these textbooks are labeled specifically " For The New Certificate Syllabus"[6]. Publishers in Hong Kong worked really hard and quickly to get textbooks ready for the schools. The main reason for this might due to the way in which Hong Kong society develops quickly especially in commercial matters.

Through interviews with teachers and textbook publishers, it was found out that textbooks played a very important role in the teaching of English in Hong Kong secondary schools. Textbook publishers in Hong Kong not only provide teaching materials but also detailed teaching and learning activities as well as suggested methods. They even suggest how much time should be devoted to carry out those learning activities. Evidence could be easily seen from those textbook publishers' seminars and workshops. A textbook publisher said in an interview;

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[6] Quoted from the cover of *English: A Modern Course* published by ARISTO Educational Press LTD.

"Anyone who speaks some English would be able to teach English in Hong Kong as we have provided everything for them. ... Sometimes teachers phone us when they come across difficulties in teaching a particular unit or task. And we would write a detailed plan for them thereby."

In Hong Kong secondary schools, there is a general teaching schedule for a whole academic year called a Scheme of Work which teachers rely on in their teaching. This Scheme of Work is designed according to the layout of the kind of textbook which the school adopts for the school cycle or weekly system. Therefore, it could be assumed that if teachers rely on textbooks a lot, (which was evident through school visits); and if textbooks catering for the 1996 HKCEE have really integrated the underlying theory behind the change of this public examination and realized this through the language activities in their textbooks, it would be likely that the 1996 HKCEE would have certain washback effects on the teaching and learning of English in Hong Kong schools, given the importance of this public examination.

Washback on teachers' attitude and behavior

As can also be seen from the survey results, teachers do have a positive attitude toward the 1996 HKCEE. However, there is not enough evidence yet to prove whether positive attitude would necessarily bring about positive changes in teaching methodology. Teachers might have a positive attitude toward the change, yet would still find it difficult to put their ideas into practice. This is evident from the written answers teachers provided when they spoke about their worries over shy and less outspoken students. Teachers also worried about difficulties over classroom management and the involvement of teaching facilities as there is an increasing requirement to carry out more active learning activities by the revised HKCEE.

From the limited data obtained from classroom observations it was clear that those teachers teaching both the old and the new syllabuses did adopt different types of activities. However, these obvious change made in teaching lay in the different activities designed in the textbooks teachers employed. This means that teachers changed their ways of organizing classroom activities according to the textbook publishers' understanding of the 1996 HKCEE. Those activities or tasks are designed only on the basis of the simple exam formats provided by the HKEA.

Sensible teachers were very careful to arrange classroom activities to achieve the requirements of the revised syllabus. In addition, they also talked about their confusion over the objectives in the revised syllabus. Virtually, teachers follow the new syllabus simply by adherence to the new textbooks at this stage. It would be very much interesting to observe how teachers would react in their teaching after the first cohort of students sit for the exam. By then, teachers will

have a clearer idea of the new exam which they can possibly rely on besides the proposed sample papers and textbooks.

Washback on the English curriculum

Spolsky (1994) points out that backwash effect usually happens irrespective of test designers' intentions and is out of their control though the reasons might be complicated in different educational settings. It is unlikely that changes would happen in such a linear and simple manner as mentioned above. As Alderson and Wall (1993) point out

> "What we did not know at the time was just how difficult it would be to determine whether washback has occurred at all, and to decide, if there were no evidence for it, whether this was because there was no such thing or because there were conditions in the educational setting that were preventing it from 'getting through'." (1993:47-48)

Even if there are favorable conditions in the educational setting in Hong Kong (See Results), we are still not in a position to formulate the nature of washback effect. It is even more difficult to say whether the effects are positive or negative. What teachers stated that they would like to change is not necessarily the same as what they actually would do in the classroom. Though Hong Kong is a fast-changing place where change is common, teachers still worry about their students. They also showed their confusion over the changes in actual teaching.

Furthermore, not enough data have been collected to show whether the new examination would change teachers' behaviors or, if it does, to what extent. From classroom observations, changes can be seen so far only in the way teachers organize classroom activities. It is difficult to see whether the washback effect observed in the above teaching activities is simply cramming for the examination or a difference in the language skills being taught. Cramming is obviously one level of washback effect. However, it would be difficult to say whether cramming of the above kind produces positive or negative washback effects on teaching. To test this, more data based on classroom observations are required. We believe teaching and learning should include more varied activities than the examination formats alone.

However, it would be natural for teachers to employ activities similar to those activities required in the examination since a lot of teachers still believe it is their responsibility to prepare their students well for the examination. If they have not done enough to familiarize their students with the test formats, they would feel guilty. One teacher said in an interview that

"I am very examination-oriented. And I will do whatever I can to get my students fully prepared for this public examination."

In Hong Kong secondary schools, the teaching at F5 stops at the end of February or earlier. March is the month for mock examinations. In May, students will sit for the certificate examinations. It is stated in the Teaching Syllabus of English (secondary) by the Curriculum Development Council that the teaching of English at F5 level will be heavily examination-oriented. Therefore, cramming for the examination would be natural in Hong Kong schools. With the introduction of the revised examination syllabus toward more task-based skills, washback effects on the teaching activities might be positive in the way language activities are carried out.

CONCLUSION

With reference to Figure 1 which investigates how different parties might be influenced by the 1996 HKCEE at the macro level, we could tentatively say that among the different aspects of teaching and learning, teaching content has so far received the most intensive washback effect in Hong Kong secondary schools - thus the area of washback intensity. Certain washback effects on teachers' attitude and behaviors have been observed by school visits and classroom observations. The role of the public examination in learners' learning has also been investigated.

However, the data collected so far are not sufficient enough to provide enough evidence to allow for an analysis of the nature of washback effects, the extent of those effects, and the quality of them. It would thus be difficult to judge, at the moment, whether those washback effects are positive or negative in teaching and learning. Further empirical data will be collected and analyzed later to provide more insights into the nature of this educational phenomenon.

It is recommended that in research of this kind, investigation should first be carried out to analyze the nature of the test type, be it a large scale public examination or classroom assessment since the function and/or the stake a particular test bears determines the degree of its influences and the area of its washback intensity. Then the investigation should direct attention to the investigation of that particular education context under which the examination is issued. Only by analyzing the particular educational context under which the examination works, would we be likely to find out how a particular examination might influence teaching and/or learning; how intensive the influence could be and the kind of washback effects, positive or negative on teaching and learning.

Moreover, we should explore the degree of the superficiality[7] of washback effect, 'form' vs. 'substance'. One of major aims of the HKEA in changing the present examination is that " the new format will have favorable washback on classroom teaching " (HKEA; 1993:5). From the preliminary results, certain obvious washback effects in aspects of teaching could be seen, for example, in the changing of textbooks. Textbook publishers have certainly changed the form, which allowed schools and teachers to have something to rely on in teaching. However, if the substance was changed, teachers would not like to buy those textbooks. The fact could be clearly observed in those publishers' seminars and workshops. Teachers turned to textbooks clearly marked for the revised examination.

Similarly changing the examination is likely to change the *kind* of exam practice, but not the *fact* of the examination practice. Changing the examination test formats does not usually change the degree of emphasis on examinations nor does it necessarily change teachers' methods in actual classroom teaching. The intention to bring in positive washback effect in classroom teaching by changing its major public examination might be ideal, yet it might only change the form of teaching not too much the substance of teaching.

As Luijten (1991) points out, examinations are not the be-all and end-all of education and the teaching process. They are not an end in themselves. Research into the role of assessment in education and the relationship between testing and teaching would contribute to the whole education purpose assessment serves.

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[7] The term is recommended by Dr. K.R. Johnson, the University of Hong Kong.

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